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## PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD LABOR

BY GRAHAM TAYLOR, D.D.,  
Warden of Chicago Commons

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This question is more than an ethical question, far deeper than a legislative question,—this is a human question. So human that it seems like one of those cross-section plans of a great structure which lets you see it from the top to the bottom. It is so human that it cuts like the great chasm of the cañon of the Colorado, all down through the strata of human life; so human that it really bewilders one at first thought, and yet we need something to lead us down from the top to the bottom, from the surface away down to the elemental principle. But we must begin at the top of the ground. I wish you could look across the street from where I live and see the little one-story house, and see the people on the porch watching for someone, and finally around the corner comes an express wagon, and in it a whole collection of new immigrants, just arriving from the old country, with their baggage, bananas and babies. Such greetings, such huggings of men with men, such kissings on both cheeks, such a wonderful cheer to welcome the poor steerage passengers as they come to this far El Dorado, to this land of promise!

Well, now what is there that effects their nature most? It is their deep, intense, almost wild love of their children, especially among the Italian immigrants. Yet the factory inspector tells us that eighty-five per cent. of those arraigned for breach of the child labor law are of the foreign-born people, and eight per cent. of them are these very Italians who come from southern Italy. How do you account for it that these people, so passionately fond of each other, can apparently be so indifferent? Well, they arrive, and there is a warm welcome given them, and after awhile the hospitality is over and the hard struggle for existence is on. They are survivors in the first stages of that hard struggle, but after awhile, when sickness or bad weather or some industrial depression comes and the father is out of work, then the temptations of severe poverty appear

and the struggle for existence is on in earnest and some of them yield, but you would be astonished to know how few do yield and let the child go to the shop.

From the new country itself there is a more infectious and insidious temptation still. It comes not from across the sea, but it comes from the very atmosphere charged with electrical industry in this new land. There comes the temptation of the quest for money that is almost the religion of the Americans. Great is American "Thrift," and Benjamin Franklin its prophet. These immigrants begin to see what their neighbors are doing; their neighbors are getting more income, so they, too, strive until they are able to buy the house in which they live. This done, they keep the family in the basement of the rear tenement and they buy a second house; and they can still pass down the streets and everybody applauds them for getting on in the world. The contagion is spreading, and in fact the inspector tells us that people who bring their children in to apply for work are fairly well dressed, especially in the summer time. In the winter they are the poor who come. Before these mostly illiterate parents get our uplift toward the appreciation of education they get the down-let to money-thrift at the expense of childhood, manhood and womanhood. So this country has to take part of the responsibility.

Two educational agencies are at command and are adequate to lift the family out of inherited indifference to the value of play and schooling, and to protect it from the aggressions of American "thrift" upon childhood. First of all the deterrent effect of enforced law is amply demonstrated by our experience in Illinois. Our collection of \$25,000 in fines from over a thousand prosecutions in a single year, is in striking contrast with the score or more convictions reported from some other large industrial States. The records of the factory inspector's office show a decrease of twenty per cent. in the discovered breaches of the law the past year over the preceding one, although during this period the school population increased two per cent. While in 1901 the number of children at work was 4.1 per cent. of the total employed in 1904, they constituted only 1.9 per cent. of the total. Meanwhile 2,200 of them have been released from the mines and thousands more from the holiday work after 7 p. m. The commensurate increase of the school attendance in Chicago indicates the pressure upon even the greediest parents, at least to hasten the process of their children's learning to read and write.

The attractive influence of the new schooling and other social agencies may be depended upon to draw such parents out of their bad ways more effectively even than they can be driven out by the terrors of the law, as applied by the compulsory education department and the factory inspectors. For from the kindergarten to the vacation school, and from the social settlement clubs to the new park houses, with their public library, stations and gymnasiums, the tendency of these educational up-lifts is to rescue the child's leisure from idleness and vice to both profit and pleasure. And this solution of the very real parental problem in the leisure of their children promises to help solve the problem of child labor.

Facing the railway entrance to Bradford, England, is the monument to a young man. Clinging to his stalwart form is the figure of a little girl. Beneath his outstretched arm a boy has fled for refuge from a pursuer, whose approach is ward off by the protector. On the base of the monument is inscribed the belated tribute to the man who dared lead the forlorn hope against child labor in England seventy years ago—"Richard Oastler was born in Bradford." Belated indeed, long after the hero had suffered his martyrdom in the debtor's prison, and neglected old age. Of that generation which Thomas Sadler arraigned before Parliament, as first guilty of child labor, he said in 1831: "Our ancestors could not have supposed it possible, posterity will not believe it true, that a generation of Englishmen had existed that would work lipping infancy of a few summers' old, regardless alike of its smiles or tears, and unmoved by its unresisting weakness, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, sixteen hours a day, and through the weary night also, till in the dewy morn of existence the bud of youth faded and fell where it was unfolded." It seems hardly possible that the light from our statue of "Liberty enlightening the world," seventy-four years after England began to repent of its crime against childhood, should fall upon a generation of Americans as heartlessly repeating the same cruel folly, as though the experience and law of civilization had not outlawed the barbarity. But by that light a new generation of Americans is emerging who will cease not to lift and bear the gauntlet that fell from Richard Oastler's hand, until every child in America is assured its right to play and learn, as the best assurance of the nation's perpetuity and progress.